



# Improving Accessibility Locallink

The locallink initiative was introduced in 2003 to improve local bus services in Nottingham.

The services improve access from residential areas to shops and essential services by providing links either to local district shopping centres and key bus interchange points or direct links to the city centre

itself. There is now a network of 6 local minibus services. These services operate either hourly or half hourly on 5 or 6 days each week.

## Key message

How local bus services can be targeted at the specific needs of elderly and disabled passengers, particularly those living in the more isolated residential areas of the City.

## Background

The locallink concept started with an experimental semi-fixed bus service, branded "MyBus", which was introduced in the Sherwood and Mapperley area in March 2003 with Urban Bus Challenge funding. MyBus has proved highly successful as a local bus service and feeder link. One of its strongest aspects is the excellent level of customer care given by regular drivers. In 2006 Nottingham Community Transport, won the tender to run further locallink services.



## Who is involved?

Locallink is a partnership between Nottingham City Council and Nottingham Community Transport to provide 6 contract bus services. The Council owns all the vehicles and provides revenue support to the operator from our Tendered Services budget.

The partnership aims to provide:

- A high standard of customer care,
- A regular, friendly and approachable operation,
- A team style of operational management,
- A service that can be used easily by the mobility impaired, including those who would normally be reliant on Dial-a-Ride or taxis,
- Operating costs contained within the £2 per passenger journey level.

The partnership has been an excellent way to develop a close relationship between the operator and the predominantly elderly and disabled users. Nottingham Community Transport has excellent skills in working with this market. The regular drivers on each service are incredibly popular with the passengers.

## The problems and how we tackled them

- The City Council has a target for all residential areas of the City to be within a 400m walking distance of a regular bus service to a district shopping centre or the city centre. Locallink services have introduced regular links for the more isolated residential areas and demand-responsive zones around most locallink routes have enhanced this.
- Car ownership in the City is lower than the national average with only 55% of households having access to a car or van. People living alone, particularly pensioners and lone parent households, are the least likely to own a car or van. In some areas access to affordable fresh food is increasingly an issue with the closure of neighbourhood shops, the cost and quality of food available in local shops and the prevalence of fast food outlets. Locallink services have been introduced to enable those without their own transport to travel to supermarkets which offer a wider choice of affordable fresh food.
- The locallink services operate with a City Council owned dedicated fleet of branded Optare Alero low-floor minibuses which have 13 seats, space for a wheelchair and are fully accessible. The minibuses can get safely into areas that are not accessible to conventional buses due to narrow roads, traffic calming, parked cars and topography and allow an easy rapport between passengers and the driver.
- More areas can be covered by the same service through the introduction of small vehicles and a demand-responsive zone around the basic route. However, in an urban context like Nottingham a fully demand-responsive service is inappropriate as over



90% of passengers are generated from the basic route section. The operation of semi-fixed basic routes ensures that each service maintains a critical base patronage level. The demand-responsive aspect is both a good selling point and provides vital links for a significant number of users, but on its own would be insufficient to support a viable service.

- It is no longer necessary to completely segregate the Dial-a Ride market for disabled people from the local bus network and many users can now use both types of operation for different needs. Provision of a service that is also accessible to disabled people means that key Dial-a-Ride resources can be more effectively re-deployed elsewhere in the City. The outcome is a more socially-inclusive service and a better level of service for everyone.

### Outcomes and impact

There is both quantitative and qualitative evidence to demonstrate the success of the locallink approach:

- The key wards served have seen a significant increase in residential coverage within 400m of a regular bus service. In one ward, Clifton North, 25% more homes are now within 400m of a regular service since the introduction of locallink operations.
- Feedback from passengers across the network has also been very positive:
  - "Bus is a Godsend"* – L6 passenger, Bulwell Hall Estate
  - "First class service"* – L5 passenger, Wollaton Park Estate
  - "Marvellous service. Drivers are courteous and obliging"* – L8 passenger, Mapperley
  - "A good service, would be lost without it"* – L8 passenger, Mapperley
  - "Tom (the driver) is excellent, great service"* – L6 passenger, Bulwell
  - "Just great"* – L1 passenger, Silverdale

### What could we have done better?

Locallink services have been very well received by their users and in the communities they serve. Services do continue to adapt in order to meet new demands and changes in travel patterns. Partners continue to look for new opportunities for this type of service and to provide additional demand-responsive facilities to existing ones.

### Next steps

The City Council will continue to seek out opportunities to improve these services, both through the introduction of new routes and expansion of demand-responsive zones along existing services.

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